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PRESS RELEASE (63) 7

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25th November, 1963

EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL
TO PAY TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY

The North Atlantic Council met in extraordinary session at noon today to pay tribute to the memory of President John F. Kennedy.

The Secretary General, Mr. Dirk U. Stikker spoke on behalf of the North Atlantic Council. The Belgian Permanent Representative, Ambassador André de Staercke, then spoke in the name of his colleagues as Dean of the Permanent Representatives. The United States Permanent Representative, Ambassador Thomas K. Finletter replied on behalf of the United States and thanked the Secretary General and the Permanent Representatives for their expressions of sorrow and sympathy.

Following the tributes the Council rose and observed several minutes of silence in memory of the late President.

Attached are the texts of these three addresses and of the telegrams sent on November 23rd by the Secretary General to President Lyndon B. Johnson and to Mrs. John F. Kennedy.

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STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL

NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL

I have asked you to meet this morning so that we may pay tribute to the memory of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, thirty-fifth President of the United States.

The death of President Kennedy at the hand of an assassin is an event that has shaken the world. This is an age which is inured to sorrow and well acquainted with grief. But the striking down of the Chief Executive of the world's greatest power in the open sunlit street is something which is difficult to grasp; and throughout the world, the reaction of the common man, as well as that of governments, has been one of numbed horror.

To our friends in the United States, we can only say; their grief is ours. They and we have lost a leader of outstanding ability, transparent sincerity and utter dedication. To President Kennedy's widow, whose courage in her ordeal words fail me to describe, and to his children, we would convey our heartfelt sympathy. We would not intrude on their sorrow, but they are constantly in our thoughts.

NATO and its affairs were very near to President Kennedy's heart. One of his first acts as President was to pledge to this Alliance, in his inaugural address,

"the loyalty of faithful friends".

It is not much more than two years (1st June, 1961) since he came to this very table to affirm, in a typically brilliant review of American policies and the world situation, his faith in this Alliance and his confidence in its aims and purposes.

Many of us here today knew John Kennedy not only as the President of his country, but as a personal friend.

It is hard for those of us who knew him well to speak of him now without emotion; of his gallantry in war; his dedication in peace; his quick intelligence; his ever-ready sympathy; his hatred of injustice and oppression in every form; and above all, of his natural, spontaneous charm. Sometimes, talking to him, it was hard to believe that this young man was really carrying the incredible burdens of a President of the United States in the nuclear age. But when John Kennedy took the oath, he said:

"Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans - born in this country, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage - and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this Nation has always been committed and to which we are committed today, at home and around the world."

Those words might well serve to describe Kennedy himself.

Nearly a hundred years ago, another American President, who also had given his life to the remedying of injustice and the relief of oppression was struck down by an assassin's hand. But before he died, Abraham Lincoln formulated, in imperishable words, the tasks that the dead bequeath to the living.

"It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work they have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from those honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion"

(Gettysburg oration)

And so to President Lyndon Johnson, who has assumed the burdens of the Presidency in such tragic circumstances, I know you would wish me to offer in your name whatever support it is in the power of this Council to give.

John Kennedy died in the flower of his age, his destiny unfulfilled, his task unfinished. The life that ended so tragically in Dallas on Friday was as abundant in promise as it had already been in achievement. Once already, he had saved the world from disaster. Had he been spared to us, who knows what further services he would have rendered to his country and to all mankind?

It is not for us to question the ways of Providence. But it is for us to resolve - as Abraham Lincoln said - "that the dead should not have died in vain".

John Kennedy's place in history is secure. His name will live as one of the great men of our time. Let us see to it that we are worthy of his sacrifice.

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ADDRESS BY THE SENIOR PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE
NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL, S.E.M. ANDRE DE STAERCKE

Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of my colleagues, I wish to join my voice to yours and proclaim with you the deep grief felt by the Council. All that words can express in such a circumstance you have said. The rest is silence, for there are no terms able to describe our sorrow at what we have lost with the assassination of President Kennedy.

By his youth, his firmness, his authority; by his extraordinary and constant presence in the most exacting of offices, he was a man who won esteem because he was great and affection because he was simple. By his death, we are frustrated of all we expected of him, and stunned as we are by fear, the crime seems to us even more odious because at the same time as the President, our hopes have been destroyed.

Cautious as well as daring, President Kennedy was gradually opening up for our Alliance prospects of peace which he based on the awareness and the protection of our rights, and on the organization of our strength. If one day the Atlantic Community is established, he will have been one of its foremost architects, since, over and above the obstacles and obscurities of the present, with that characteristic mixture of idealism and practical commonsense which is the gift of genius to youth, he had been able to conjure up a vision of the future. In his last speech, the one he did not have an opportunity to deliver in Dallas, he said: "America's leadership must be guided by the lights of learning and reason - or else those who confuse rhetoric with reality and the plausible with the possible will gain the ascendancy with their seemingly swift and simple solutions to every world problem."

Last May, when I had the honour, after the Ottawa Meeting, of accompanying Mr. Spaak on his visit to the President, I noticed several books on a small divan in the oval office in which we were received. One of them was the abridged edition of Thucydides published by the Oxford University Press. This serves

as a reminder that the President was not only a statesman but also a humanist to whom nothing touching humanity was foreign. Suddenly, from this little book, doubtless well-thumbed by him, springs to mind a passage which seems to summarise his existence and ultimate sacrifice, and which runs something like this: "His life, his property, he abandoned to the defence of the Community. As he saw it, the most glorious adventure was an heroic attempt to save a certain conception of existence. Leaving Hope, that fickle goddess, to deal with him as she might, he met his fate in his prime. His memory escapes the reproaches of human lips, while his body carries the marks of blows. In a flash, in the flower of youth, he has been snatched from a world filled, in the sight of his dying eyes, not with terror but with hope." Yes, Mr. Chairman, the last vision of the world which this great soul beheld was doubtless a vision of hope, of the hope being prepared for us and which will remain with us though the struggle had to be broken off.

That is why I wish our United States colleague to convey the condolences of the North Atlantic Council to his Government, to Mrs. Kennedy and to his family, overwhelmed with sorrow, and to tell them that the death of President Kennedy is not only an irreparable loss for them and the United States, but for the Alliance and the whole world. May God maintain in his successor, his country and all of us, the line of inspiration proposed to us by his life, in conformity with the prayer which President Kennedy expressed in the last sentence of his last speech by quoting the verse of the Psalmist:

"Except the Lord keep the city,
the watchman waketh but in vain."

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STATEMENT BY THOMAS K. FINLETTER
TO THE NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL,
25th NOVEMBER, 1963

Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Council,

It is good, and right, that the heart-warming words we have just heard should have been said around this Alliance table. The dedication of President Kennedy to NATO as the keystone of United States foreign policy, and the fact that you have all known the man, makes it inevitable that you should want to share our sorrow with us, at this our accustomed meeting place.

The sense of personal loss, and of deep resentment that this shocking thing has happened, is with all of us. These feelings are too intimate to dwell on. But I may tell you how deeply touched we Americans are by the personal sorrow our colleagues have made so plain to us over the past few days as they have told us of their feelings for our lost President.

Life, though, must go on, and the cause for which President Kennedy and so many other great men of all our countries have worked must be served with increasing determination and, I deeply believe, more uncompromisingly than before. What now comes to the front of one's mind and will is a sense of unfinished business. The tragedy, for me at least, has had the effect of intensifying what has always been the main thing - the imperative to work and to struggle to protect and make more perfect the basic principles and freedoms of our Free World Society, the principles and freedoms for which our President gave his life.

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Telegrammes sent by Mr. Dirk U. Stikker
Secretary General of NATO, on November 23rd, 1963

PRESIDENT Lyndon B. JOHNSON,
The White House,
Washington D.C.
U.S.A.

"I am deeply distressed at the tragedy which has struck the people of the United States and of the entire world. My colleagues of the North Atlantic Council and I are joined in our expression of the most profound sorrow at the senseless act which deprived the United States and the Alliance of such a wise and determined leader. May God grant you wisdom and courage as you assume the heavy burden and solemn responsibilities which fall on that office to which the hearts of free men everywhere are turned for inspiration."

Mrs. John F. KENNEDY,
The White House,
Washington D.C.
U.S.A.

"It is impossible for me to express adequately the immense grief with which I received the stunning news of this unbelievable tragedy. To the realization of an incalculable loss to the leadership of the free world is joined my profound personal sorrow at the meaningless act which has deprived me of a friend whose many kind personal acts have touched me deeply. My wife joins me in the hope that God may grant you and your children the courage to face the difficult days ahead, and may you find solace in the knowledge that the memory of your husband and his great leadership will not fade from the minds and hearts of free men."